

TESTIS IN COELO FIDELIS

The True Witness

AND

CATHOLIC CHRONICLE.

VOL. XXV.

MONTREAL, FRIDAY, OCT. 30, 1874.

NO. 11.

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LORD DACRE OF GILSLAND;

OR,

The Rising in the North:

AN HISTORICAL ROMANCE OF THE DAYS OF ELIZABETH.

By E. M. Stewart.

CHAPTER VIII.—(CONTINUED).

They were now riding down the main street of Tutbury. This town had long declined from the consequence it possessed when its Castle was the abode of Constance of Castile, the wife of John of Gaunt, Henry the Seventh had indeed visited it when inclined to enjoy the sports of the chase in the adjacent forests of Needwood, but since his reign Tutbury had again fallen into neglect; nor had it sheltered since that period a royal head till it was made the prison of the ill-fated Mary. The town was neat and well kept; many of its houses were covered even to the pointed gables with ivy, and the sunbeams sparkling on their narrow casements made a pleasant contrast to the green leaves. The young stranger now courteously invited Lord Dacre to accompany him to the principal hotel, there to partake of the morning meal; but Leonard Dacre would not pause either for rest or refreshment till he had seen to the fulfilment of the main object of his journey. Thanking the young man, therefore, he bade him adieu; then, in a low tone, he recommended him to repress in common company those just murmurings at the things that were, in which he had so lately indulged. The brow of the youth crimsoned at this admonition, gentle as were the terms in which it was couched.

"Good sir," he replied, "I think me not quite a fool who babble freely to every base hind or fat burglar that may chance to fall in my way. There is that in thy bearing which marks thy gentle blood, the honorable spirit on which I might rely, if even the gallant Dacre of Gilsland had been all unknown to me by sight."

Leonard started, and expressed his surprise at this recognition on the part of a person with whom he was unacquainted. The youth smiled, and replying that would Lord Dacre escape recognition he must be less prompt to succor the oppressed, took off his plumed hat, and, waving it with a gallant air, rode into the yard of the hotel.

Meanwhile Lord Dacre turned his horse's head towards a retired portion of the town. Here a few thinly scattered houses or rather cottages appeared, forming a loose kind of disjunct street—the river Dore running behind the gardens on one side of it, and the Castle hill rising immediately above it. Among the more humble tenements rose one of a superior description. It was a low-roofed structure, originally built only of timber; but falling into the hands of wealthy proprietors, one room after another had been added to the old dwelling till the ancient and humble wood cottage had disappeared in the handsome house of red brick, while the building was broken into a fantastic but picturesque form. A large garden, which stretched to the banks of the river, surrounded this house, and it had a handsome gateway, surmounted by a bell. On Lord Dacre striking on this bell, the gate was at once opened by a pretty Staffordshire damsel, and on his inquiring for Master Gilbert Giffard, she summoned a male servant who was working in the garden, and bidding him to take charge of the stranger's horse, ran to inform her master of his arrival. The eyes of Lord Dacre, during the girl's absence, wandered to the grey towers of the Castle as they rose above the town, and his heart throbbled with the hope of speedy admittance to their beautiful captive. In a few minutes the girl returned, and conducting him to the house ushered him into an oblong but pleasant apartment hung with pale green says, with cushions and couches of the same, and having windows that looked out upon a lawn which descended to the edge of the river. Lord Dacre had not waited long when the door opened, and the master of the house appeared.

Were face and figure to be held as index of the mind, an unfavorable opinion would most surely have been formed of that Master Gilbert Giffard. His stature was low, and he stooped considerably in the shoulders—add, to which, he had a slouching, slovenly gait. Nor was his countenance more impressive; his complexion was sallow, his features heavy, and ill-formed, and his small grey eyes peered, with a most unpleasant expression, from under an overhanging brow. His speech was slow, and hesitating; yet he addressed Lord Dacre in the language

of one long known and trusted. On a request from the latter that he would procure for him an interview with the captive Queen, he replied, in his usual cautious tone, that his best endeavors should be exerted for that purpose; but, alas, such was the vigilance of her keeper, Sir Amias Paulet, that he feared his own inability to accomplish such a design. Something of a more severe expression than was common to the brow of Lord Dacre made itself visible there on this reply.

"Surely, Giffard," he said, "you will not deny me so small a service. Though it is not my wont to boast of any favors which it may have been in my power to render to another, I cannot on this occasion forbear to say that I might well claim a much more important advantage at your hands; nor must you suppose that I am ignorant of your ability to procure access to Queen Mary, or that by your means she has repeatedly conveyed letters to Charles Paget and her other friends in France."

The sallow cheek of Giffard was slightly flushed as Lord Dacre made these assertions. His tone was so decided to admit of Giffard screening himself by a denial. He therefore replied,

"That he had indeed on more than one occasion taken charge of letters for the Scottish Queen; but that his dear and invaluable friend, Lord Dacre, must surely perceive that there was a vast difference between the mere conveyance of a letter and the much more difficult project of procuring for him a personal interview with Mary. Certainly his noble friend could not be ignorant that Sir Amias would not permit any stranger to approach her."

Lord Dacre listened to these declarations in mingled disgust and apprehension. That Giffard could, if he chose, procure for him the desired interview he well knew. Was it, then, cowardice or treachery that lurked beneath his refusal? Whichever might be his motive, the man had now been trusted far far to allow to Dacre a security in retreating. He saw no better course than still persist in his request and having obtained the desired interview with Mary, to hasten the warlike preparations in the North. In pursuance of this design, he remarked:

"An interview with an acknowledged stranger I never supposed that Sir Amias Paulet would allow, but I know, Giffard, that you have access to the Castle, and that more than one member or the inferior portion of the household is in your employ. How easy were it, then, for me to accompany you thither in the guise of one of your attendants, and thereby procure speech with the Queen?"

"It seemeth," said Giffard, smiling, and preparing slowly to yield, as he found Lord Dacre obstinate in his demand—"it seemeth that you, my Lord, imagine that I hold a high place in the estimation of the severe Sir Amias, if he will so easily admit me within the walls of Tutbury! Praise my discretion, dear Lord, I assure you that the good will of the starchy Puritan was not so easy to win, 'tis a purgatory of some moment to listen to and to partake in the bigotry of his cant!"

"Truly, Giffard," replied Lord Dacre, "I can scarce praise the wisdom, whatever may be its results, which thus leads thee to contemn for the time thine own faith, for the purpose of gaining an influence, however desirable, over the fanatic Sir Amias. Thou knowest, Giffard, it was of old a maxim of mine, that even an honorable cause might be disgraced by the means which promoted its success."

"Yet in this case, dear Lord, I had none other," answered Giffard, "I think you that as a Catholic gentleman, loyal to the religion of his fathers, I could have obtained a seat at the board of Sir Amias, or admission when I will at the Castle of Tutbury? Ah, dearest Dacre, thou shouldst have lived in the old time, which could better have comprehended thy generous spirit; however unwilling, my friend, would we succeed in these days, even in a righteous cause, we must not scrupulously pause to meditate upon the means by which our success may be won."

"Such then," answered Lord Dacre, "are the lamentable effects of the first perversion of the principles of justice. Not merely the evil doers are involved in the guilt of the evil which they have first wrought, they seem to fling over society an enchanted web, which enircles even the righteous in the coils of vice, compelling them to work with evil instruments, even to attain the principles of right. In what a wretched condition must the world be—how far must humanity have deviated from its original innocence, when the lovers of virtue cannot virtuously attain a virtuous purpose?"

"'Tis even so," said Giffard, "and the course of wisdom, dearest Lord, is most unquestionably to submit to the evil which we cannot control—nay, even to seek amid its many mischiefs for some means by which to work for a better order of things. It is upon this principle that, with Sir Amias Paulet, your school-companion and friend in France, the Catholic Gilbert Giffard, becomes the most austere and fanatical of reformers; by such means is it that we procure for you, even this day, the dangerous distinction of an audience of Queen Mary."

"Yet do I loathe these means," said Lord Dacre; "must they not eventually debase the mind which stoops constantly to use them?"

"You are too severe, dear Lord," responded Giffard, "your over nice honor would even leave all the game in the hands of our foes. But tarry, I pray you, here while I send in my serving man with some refreshment, for your weary looks speak of a long journey; and I, dear Leonard, who know you so well, do I not know that ere now you have neglected your own strength, even unto faintness. And when you have tasted of food and rest, why then I will myself equip the noble Lord of Gilsland like mine own attendant; and it shall go hard but I obtain for him freely speech with the Scottish Queen."

So saying, Giffard withdrew. As the door closed after him, Lord Dacre's head sunk upon his hand, and he remained in a musing position. Was he too suspicious? Had the turbulent nature of the times, then, infected him with so much of its own evil that he keenly and unobtainably scrutinized men's looks and words? Was the change in Giffard's manner so very sudden?—had he so very abruptly departed from his first assertion that he could not procure for his noble friend an audience with Queen Mary? Was it not indeed true, as he had said, that a letter might be much more easily conveyed than an interview obtained?—And therefore should he suspect this man—a Catholic of good family, and one of his

own earliest and most beloved companions—one, too, who had for years been employed in mitigating the sufferings of Mary, by procuring for her the means of communicating with her friends? Yet it was known that Giffard had lately assumed the tone and manner of a determined Puritan; among his friends he avowed that it was merely for the purpose of obtaining an influence over Paulet, and boasted that this influence had brought him into much closer communication with the royal prisoner than he had ever before been able to obtain. This Lord Dacre knew to be true; yet the noble pride of his upright mind disdained the means by which Giffard worked, and suggested doubts of his honesty who could under any temptation employ such means. It was not that Leonard Dacre imagined that Giffard would be guilty of the extent of treachery that would betray the unfortunate captive and her friends. He believed him to be yet too Catholic in heart—he yet felt for him too much of that strong attachment which a generous mind nourishes as the effect of early association, even though its object possesses no other merit or attraction. Besides, the mind of every man is kindly disposed towards the person on whom it has been his fortune to confer a benefit; and it had been the chance of Lord Dacre to preserve to Giffard both his liberty and his life, when he fell unjustly, during their mutual residence in Paris, under the suspicion of the French Government. In such circumstances as these, it is no matter for wonder that Lord Dacre spurned the idea of absolute treachery on the part of Giffard as the offspring of these miserable treacheries that were the daily topics of discourse, rather than of any reasonable suspicion; nor could he believe that personally speaking, and even towards himself, that Giffard would be so basely ungrateful. Nevertheless, he could not dismiss from his mind an uncomfortable feeling, which had its rise in Giffard's acknowledgment of his assumption of Puritanical principles in the presence of Sir Amias Paulet. These meditations of Lord Dacre were interrupted by the entrance of their object, followed by two serving-men bearing a chine of beef, a sagon of wine, and some manchet.

No assurances on the part of Lord Dacre could prevail upon Giffard to accompany his visitor to the Castle till after he had taken some refreshment; he also for an hour or two needed repose. The announcement that it would now be unlikely that an opportunity would occur for introducing Leonard to the Queen till late in the day, terminated the amicable dispute, and, though unwilling, Lord Dacre at length complied with the suggestions of his friend, and was conducted to a sleeping room.

The intense fatigue, both mental and bodily, which he had lately undergone completely overpowered him when he had sought repose, and he sunk into a profound sleep. When he at length awoke, the declining sunbeams at once convinced him that the day was far advanced; and angry with himself for having yielded at all to the entreaties of Giffard, he sprang from the couch, and hastily donned the grey doublet and mantle, guarded with red, which formed the livery of Giffard. Before leaving the chamber, he happened by chance to approach the casement which overlooked the garden. What was his surprise to perceive, walking there, the young cavalier by whom he had been overtaken in the morning—well remembered by his gallant bearing, and the plume of black and orange color that nodded in his hat. He was in deep converse with Giffard, who held in his hand a letter, to which their conversation appeared to refer, as the youth more than once pointed to it. While Lord Dacre still gazed, unperceived by them, at the casement, they walked towards the garden gate, which Giffard himself opened to give egress to the youth, of whom he appeared to take leave with every mark of good will and attachment. Lord Dacre, however, was concerned to perceive, as he walked towards the house after having closed the gate upon the cavalier, the smile of, as it seemed, malignant triumph which played upon his features. He turned over and over the letter which the young man had left with him, examining the seal and superincursion; then he paused, and pinching it in various ways, endeavored to spy into its contents. This, however, was not easy, without breaking the seal that confined the skin of Ross silk which, according to the fashion of the time, was fastened across the letter. Again Giffard hesitated; and as Lord Dacre watched him from the window the varying expression of his countenance, he could plainly perceive that he balanced between a lingering sense of honor and the violence of his curiosity. The latter prevailed; and taking a knife from his pocket, he cut the silk, and tearing open the letter, eagerly perused the contents—an evident breach of trust, of which no man retaining a particle of honor could have been guilty.

Who, thought Lord Dacre, was this youth, and what might be the subject of his interview with Giffard, who had manifestly played him so false, for had the contents of the letter been designed for his personal use it would have been left unsealed. That the young man was one of the Government spies, of whom Giffard was himself making a tool, Lord Dacre could not believe. There was too much of frankness in the indignation with which he had that morning spoken to Lord Dacre of state affairs to suffer the latter to adopt the opinion that anger had been assumed—a mere lure to entrap the unwary listener. What, then, was Giffard?

Distressed by those doubts of his friend's honor and fidelity, which he could not but entertain, Lord Dacre descended to the lower apartment. There he found Giffard still with the letter in his hands, and so absorbed in its contents that he did not at first notice the entrance of Lord Dacre. On perceiving that nobleman, he hastily thrust the suspicious paper into the folds of his doublet and approached him with apparent composure. Impelled by his suspicions, Leonard enquired concerning the young man whom he had seen talking with his host in the garden, and mentioned his morning's rencontre with himself. Startled by this enquiry, and fearing perhaps that he had been seen by Lord Dacre to break the seal of the letter when in the garden, Giffard for a moment seemed confused; then regaining his composure, he replied that the youth was the brother of a young man who had married his niece; that the girl and her husband resided in a distant part of the country; and this young man being compelled by business to pass through Tutbury, the niece had availed herself of that event to send a

letter to her uncle. Glibly as this story was told, Lord Dacre doubted its truth, and enquiring whether the young man would make any stay in Tutbury, was answered, as he expected in the negative. But whatever might now be his suspicions of Giffard, he had no choice but to accept of his conduct to the Castle. By his means only could he expect to obtain an interview with the Queen of Scots; and, for a comfort, he also knew that Giffard could not be present at that interview, his share in the business being to keep Sir Amias occupied, while one of his subordinates within the Castle conducted Lord Dacre to the presence of the Queen.

Solacing himself with this reflection, and with a determination that Giffard should know but little of his real designs, Leonard set forth for the Castle, under the conduct of his doubtful guide.

The day had changed since the morning—all its beauty had departed, the sun had sunk among the clouds, and a gray mist rose from the earth, dispelled only at intervals by a biting and almost wintry gust of wind that blew from the North. Above this mist rose the towers of the Castle, frowning over the wood-clad hill whose summit they crowned. As Lord Dacre and Giffard now ascended this hill, showers of leaves were whirled from the branches of the trees as they waved moaningly in the wind. The scene was peculiarly dreary; for the sky, since the sun had gone down, had assumed a leaden hue, yet darker masses of cloud drifting before the gust; the glimpse, too, of the river which was occasionally obtained was not more cheering—chill and dark, save where here and there the wind had curled its waters into a wreath of white foam, it rushed along its course at the foot of the Castle hill. The edifice itself had been so long deserted that its towers were topped with nettles and deadly night-shade; they were so ancient and so dreary that, as Lord Dacre looked up at them, his heart ached for the moment, when the poor captive was first imprisoned within their walls.

A deep fosse and a lofty embattled wall surrounded the Castle on three sides. To the north was a draw-bridge and a massive gateway, the principal entrance to the Castle. But even at this period the edifice was sinking to decay. A huge cleft appeared in the northern tower, and the keep, garlanded with ivy and crusted with moss, seemed mourning at its own ruin and desolation. The measured pace of the sentinels on the walls—their interchange of the watchword—the hollow sighing of the wind as it shook the long rank grass that waved on the battlements—or the occasional dashing of the deep, black waters of the moat—were the only sounds that met Lord Dacre's ears. Being challenged by a sentinel from the walls, Giffard prayed for admittance to Sir Amias Paulet; and after some little delay the harsh creaking of bolts and clattering of chains announced that the drawbridge was about to be lowered. It was again raised after Lord Dacre and his companion had passed over it, and they found themselves in the Castle court. The desolation of the place was here more visible—the court itself was grass-grown, many of the windows of the ruined keep were broken in, and the rising wind screamed shrilly through the apertures. On the eastern side of the area stretched a long line of low buildings, the battlement wall of the Castle rising over them; in these buildings were the apartments of the Queen. A gray-headed serving-man now approached, and addressing Giffard said that Sir Amias would be right glad to receive him in the banquetting hall of the Castle. Thither accordingly were Lord Dacre and Giffard led. This hall was a somewhat spacious but very dreary apartment, roofed and wainscoted with oak; and its cheerless aspect was increased by the pale twinkling light that occasionally shot from a few decaying embers on the vast hearth. The windows of this apartment opened upon the north rampart, overlooking the Castle hill and the river.

Nothing, however, was now to be discerned from them, in the fast gathering shades of evening, save the melancholy waving of the trees in the woods below the Castle. Near to the hearth was drawn a small table, on which burned two tapers; and a high-backed and carved oaken chair that stood beside it was occupied by Sir Amias Paulet, the morose guardian of the ill-fated Mary. Beside the knight stood a youth of some eighteen years, whose ruddy frank features formed a striking contrast to the severe and mortified aspect of Sir Amias, of whom it might have been said that all the gloom of Calvinism was seated in his tightly drawn lips and scowling brow. He rose on the approach of Giffard, and welcomed him with as much cordiality as his austere nature would permit.

"Verily, friend Giffard," he said, "it cheereth my heart to hold with thee some little godly converse. In truth my spirit often waxeth low under that heavy charge which it hath pleased the Queen's grace to impose upon me. The vain amusements of the idolatrous Princess are bitter as wormwood to the witnessing of the faithful; and still, in spite of all wholesome counsel, does she persist in smiting the lute, and chanting of songs, and in the unholy frivolities of the billiard-table and the chess-board."

"Surely," answered Giffard, "the amount of thy grace, Sir Amias, is indeed necessary to enable thee to tolerate such abominations!"

"Aye, aye," returned Paulet; but it is not for us, friend, to complain of the weight of our own burden; we must even bear it with whatever godliness of patience we may. And amid all the weary vanities of life, should it not be doubly felt as a blessing when the quiet company of a discreet friend is vouchsafed unto us? Let thy serving-man accompany Giles to the hall, and we will even spend the evening in serious converse."

"Right willingly," responded Giffard. Then turning to the youth, who advanced from the back of Paulet's chair, he recommended Lord Dacre to his special care, putting his hand upon his rapier's hilt as he spoke. The young man bowed low, and beckoning Lord Dacre to follow him, withdrew from the apartment. Scarcely had he closed the door, when he approached Lord Dacre more closely, and softly whispered—

"It is your wish, gentle sir, to obtain speech with Queen Mary? Then perceiving the start of surprise with which the question was listened to by Lord Dacre, he added: "Master Giffard, and myself are, by necessity, driven to converse by signs, and when he put his hand to his sword, I knew then what service you required at my hands."

"Truly, good youth," answered Dacre, "your surmise was most correct. My friend Giffard has indeed informed me that he should give you a token by which to know that I stood in need of your good service; but I knew not that you would thereby learn even the mode in which it was required."

"If it please you, then, noble sir," answered Giles, "we will lose no time. There are but few of the household at present about her Grace's apartments, and I can without difficulty obtain speech with Mistress Kennedy, to whom you may deliver any message to enquire whether it will please the Queen's Highness to see you. I have here a key which opens a private door in the court-yard, by which we may obtain admittance to her rooms."

So saying, the young man led the way to the Castle court. But they had scarcely stepped into it when a crowd of people issued from the buildings occupied by the Queen. Upon perceiving them, Giles immediately beckoned Lord Dacre to conceal himself behind a projecting buttress. As the crowd rushed across the court, Leonard, without being himself seen, discovered that they were dragging forcibly along a young man about thirty years of age; his wrists were tightly bound with a cord, his hair and garments disordered by the violence with which he was thrusted through the court; and his features which were naturally intelligent, were wrung by the pain that he suffered from the cords across his naked wrists. His eyes, however, were cast upwards, with a resigned expression, and he uttered neither groan nor murmur.

The guards by whom he was surrounded were not so silent; and loud cries of "Malignant Papist!" "Base idolater;" smote the ears of Lord Dacre, while he could hear, as well as see the blows by which these epithets were accompanied.

Indignant at this scene, he was about to step from behind the buttress, when the pressure of Giles' hand upon his arm recalled him to recollection. He therefore drew back, and the poor victim was again forced forward. Having reached the opposite side of the court-yard, the guards unlocked a door in the western tower, and pushing their prisoner forward, followed him into the building. In a low but indignant tone, Lord Dacre now demanded from his companion an explanation of this scene; and was informed that the young man was a Catholic recusant and a suspected priest; and that by the orders of Sir Amias, he was every day forcibly conveyed to the Castle chapel in the western tower, there to be present at the Reformed service which was customary for the benefit of the garrison. He had now, Giles remarked, been dragged there to hear the evening prayers.

"Just Heaven!" exclaimed Lord Dacre, "do these men imagine that they serve their God when they thus abuse the conscience of their fellow-beings?"

"In truth, noble sir," said Giles, "I am no learned doctor to dispute on matters of religion. I am content to say my prayers, and to do my friends a good turn when it lies in my power, while I would not render a bad one, even to my foes. I am a poor, simple, serving-man, acknowledging my simplicity, unworthy to discuss the high topics of dispute with the Church of Rome; but, in truth, it seems to me that it were well that man in these days—both great and small—took a lesson even of my simplicity!—There were then more of charity and good order in the world."

"It were, indeed, to be wished, mine honest friend," said Lord Dacre; "thy creed of charity is indeed that for the promotion of which we should earnestly pray."

While they thus spoke they had reached that door which had been mentioned by Giles. It was not the same from which the guards had lately issued with their prisoner, who was confined, Giles now informed Lord Dacre, in an apartment near to those occupied by the Queen. The door, which he now unlocked, was, he said, never used but by himself, he being the sole possessor of the key. This door at once admitted them into a long passage, at the end of which a narrow staircase led to the upper apartments. On ascending this staircase with his guide, Lord Dacre found himself in a small, vaulted chamber. It had but one window, which was grated, and placed high in the wall. An arched opening on one side of this apartment discovered another long passage, in which Giles said were situated the doors of the Queen's apartments. He now quitted Lord Dacre, saying that he would go and seek Mistress Kennedy, one of Mary's maids of honor. As the sound of his footsteps died away in the long passage, Lord Dacre glanced round the dismal chamber in which he was left waiting. What a dwelling was this, for the royal, the beautiful Mary! A prison-house indeed! The pale light of a declining and sunless afternoon scarcely illuminated that dusky chamber; long wreaths of ivy flapped against the window as the autumnal wind sobbed round the building, and the footsteps of Lord Dacre, as he paced across the silent apartment, returned a hollow sound but little less dismal than that continual moaning of the wind. Suddenly his reveries were interrupted by the chords of a lute, delicately touched. After a slow and sad symphony, a female voice sang in a sweet but plaintive tone, the following words:

Ah, wherefore sigh, thou bitter wind,
So mournfully around my cell?
Thy pious light are not confined
To that drear spot where captives dwell.
There should be gladness in thy tone,
Thou rover of the land and sea;
What dost thou with the prisoner's moan,
Wild wind, the restless and the free?

Yet moan, moan on, thou bitter wind,
About my prison-house again;
And 'mid thy whisp'ring I will find
A voice bore from the surging main,
And conjure to my longing eye
The scenes which thy wild wing has swept,
For me who vainly bled and wept.

Yes, mourn the noble, young, and brave,
Whom timely lightened in their bloom;
Whom nobleness nor youth could save
When mixed with hapless Mary's doom.
Renew those bitter, earliest tears,
Long since for royal Francis shed,
And shudder to the griefs, the fears,
I numbered o'er pale Darnley dead!

Then moan, moan on, thou bitter wind,